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ABSTRACT

The Puente Project is a statewide program that helps Mexican American/Latino community college students in California achieve their academic goals. Puente's goals are to reduce the number of Mexican American/Latino community college students who drop out of school and increase the number who transfer to four-year institutions. To meet these goals, the project trains English teachers and Mexican American counselors to work as teams in conducting one-year writing/counseling/mentoring programs for Mexican American/Latino students. Since Puente began at Chabot College in 1982, 18 other California community colleges have initiated Puente programs on their campuses and over 1,800 students have been served. The programs are monitored on a regular basis, and data are collected each year on student enrollments, retention, and transfer. These data indicate that 83% of the students who enrolled in Puente successfully completed the developmental writing class; 72% of those who went on to take English 1A completed it; and a total of 134 Puente students transferred to a state or private university. The program's success can be attributed to the collaboration between English teachers and Mexican American counselors, research-based writing methods, culturally-based academic counseling, an exemplary training model with ongoing staff development, strong community-based support, and a working partnership among community groups, postsecondary institutions, philanthropic organizations, and corporations. (JMC)

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Board of Governors
California Community Colleges
July 13-14, 1989

THE PUENTE PROJECT 4

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Educational Policy

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THE PUENTE PROJECT 4

A Report

Background

The Puente Project is a successful, statewide academic program that helps Mexican American/Latino community college students achieve their educational goals. Twenty programs now operate in nineteen California community colleges (see Appendix A). Eighteen hundred students have enrolled in Puente since it began in 1982. Over 600 professionals from the Hispanic community serve as mentors to the students.

Puente's goals are to reduce the number of Mexican American/Latino students who drop out of community colleges and to increase the number who transfer to four-year institutions. The project meets its goals by training English teachers and Mexican American counselors to work as teams in conducting one-year writing/counseling/mentoring programs for Mexican American/Latino students. Puente counselors also provide continuing support throughout the transfer process.

The Puente Project was created at Chabot College in 1982 by its co-directors, Patricia McGrath and Felix Galaviz. In July 1985, the California Community Colleges and the University of California (UC) became co-sponsors, and the Office of the President of the UC system assumed responsibility for housing the program and acting as its fiduciary agent. In July 1987, the Governor approved regular State funding for Puente through the budgets of its co-sponsors. Puente is also expected to raise funds annually from the private sector.

Analysis

A presentation will be made to the Board on the major components of the Puente Project at the July meeting. Areas to be covered are: the problems Mexican American/Latino students encounter in the community colleges, and the unique way

in which Puente addresses these problems; the reasons why Puente has won strong grassroots support from the Hispanic community; and the ways in which the educational segments can create working partnerships.

Staff Presentation: *James Meznek, Vice Chancellor*
Educational Policy

Patricia McGrath, Co-Director
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Puente Project

THE PUENTE PROJECT

Overview

The Puente Project is a successful statewide academic program that helps Mexican American/Latino community college students achieve their educational goals. Twenty programs now operate in 19 California community colleges (see Appendix A). Over 600 professionals from the Hispanic community serve as mentors to the students.

Puente's goals are to reduce the number of Mexican American/Latino students who drop out of community colleges and to increase the number who transfer to four-year institutions. The project meets its goals by training English teachers and Mexican American counselors to work as teams in conducting one-year writing/counseling/mentoring programs for Mexican American/Latino students. Puente counselors also provide continuing support throughout the transfer process.

The demand for the program is high because the need is great, and because Puente is successful in meeting its goals. In California, 80-85 percent of the Mexican American/Latino students who go on to college enroll in a community college. Yet the majority of Hispanic community college students drop out, and only a few transfer to four-year colleges and universities. In 1986, 160,000 Mexican American/Latino students attended community colleges, but only 485 (one-third of 1%) transferred to the University of California (CPEC, 1986). Twenty-six percent of the students who complete Puente transfer. Of those who transfer to a California public university, twenty-six percent enroll at a UC campus, a rate almost double that of other community college students.

Organization

The Puente Project is sponsored jointly by the California Community Colleges and the University of California (UC). Individual community colleges provide the counseling and instructional staff who conduct the campus program.

Puente's central staff consists of two co-directors, one research and training coordinator, and two full-time support staff, all housed in the Office of the President of the University. The central staff is responsible for meeting with local administrators, selecting Puente English teachers and Mexican American counselors, providing initial and ongoing training to teacher/counselor teams, establishing close working relationships with four-year college personnel, fund raising, reporting, and performing other administrative duties.

Puente has an Advisory Board representing the Hispanic community, educational institutions, and the business community (see Appendix B).

Funding History

The Puente Project was created at Chabot College in 1982 by its co-directors Patricia McGrath and Felix Galaviz. After two pilot programs, the project received private

funding for 1983-1984 under the auspices of the Bay Area Writing Project, UC, Berkeley, to replicate Puente at four California community colleges. Based on the success of that experiment, Puente received private funds in 1984 to expand to more colleges. Since 1983, the co-directors have raised funds to cover the cost of their reassigned time from Chabot College.

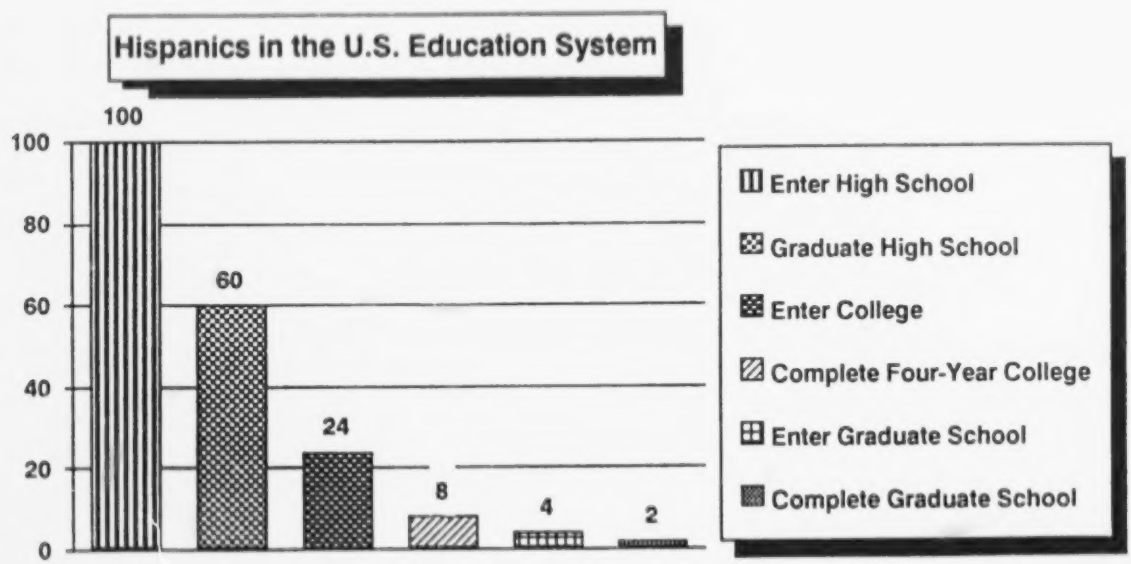
In July 1985, the California Community Colleges and University of California became co-sponsors, and the Office of the President of the University system assumed responsibility for housing the program and acting as its fiduciary agent. In 1986, the University provided funding for one clerical position. In July 1987, the Governor approved funding for Puente through the budgets of it co-sponsors. Puente also is expected to raise funds each year from the private sector.

The Problem

The number of Mexican American/Latino students who drop out of the educational system is alarming. According to a March 1987 article in the *New York Times*, "People of Hispanic descent are America's youngest and fastest-growing ethnic group . . . and they are far more likely to drop out of school than members of any other ethnic group."[1]

Chart 1 provides a context within which to examine the problems the Puente Project addresses:

Chart 1



Source: Commission on Higher Education of Minorities

[1]Peter Applebome, "Educators Alarmed by Growing Rate of Dropouts Among Hispanic Youth." *The New York Times*. National News, Sunday, March 15, 1987.

Puente is reversing this drop-out trend because it successfully addresses three major areas that prevent Mexican American/Latino community college students from achieving academic success: lack of writing skills, lack of professional role models, and lack of knowledge about the educational system.

Program Results

Puente programs are monitored on a regular basis, and data is collected each year on student enrollments, retention, and transfer. In addition, pre- and post-course assessments of writing samples by Puente and comparison students are conducted by University and State University readers. A 1987 writing assessment showed that Puente continues to be successfully replicated at new college sites.

Program Growth

Charts 2 and 3 show four aspects of program growth since 1982: number of programs; number of teachers and counselors trained to conduct Puente programs; number of central staff; and number of students enrolled in Puente each year:

Chart 2

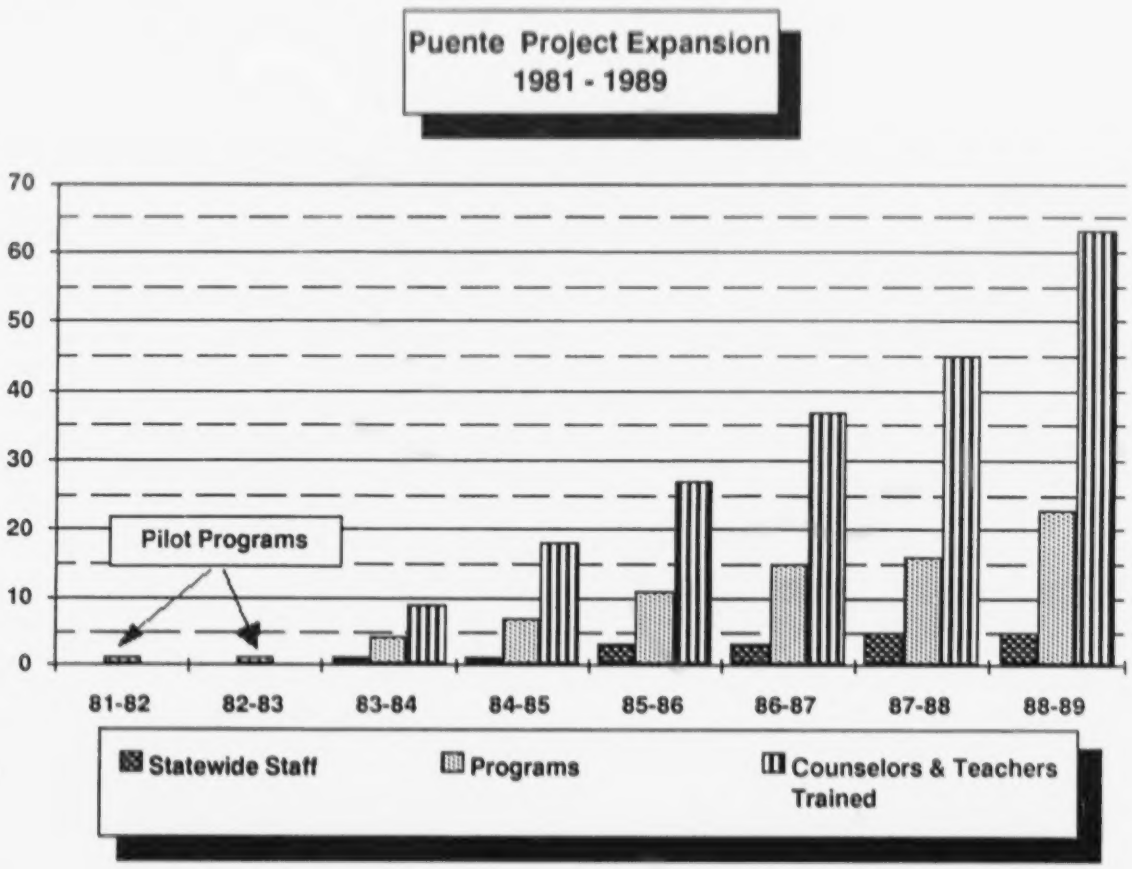
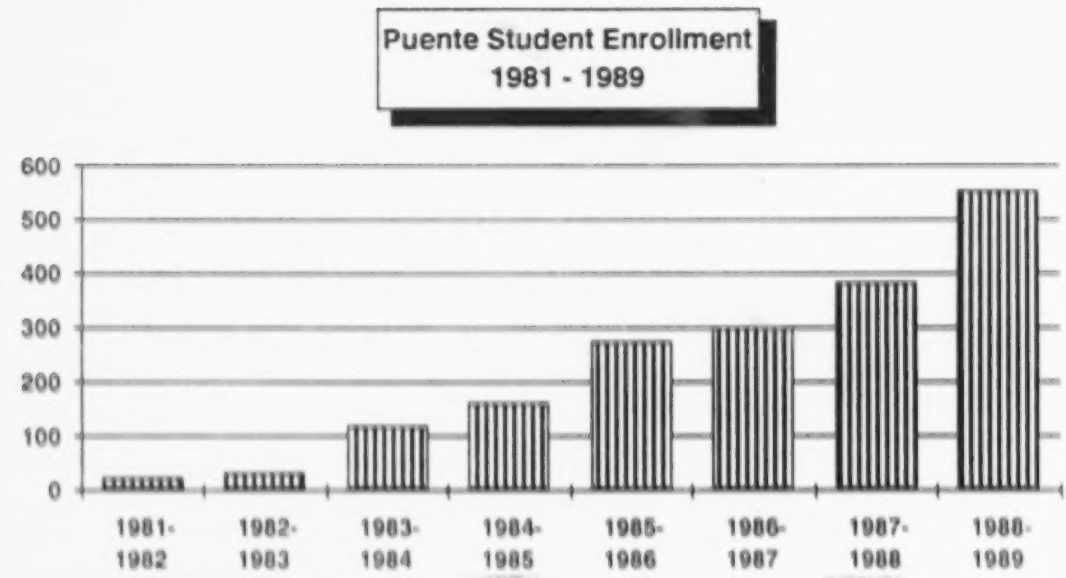


Chart 3



Retention Data

Approximately 1,800 students have enrolled in Puente since 1982. Eighty-three percent of the students who enroll in Puente successfully complete the developmental writing class. Seventy-two percent of the students who go on to English 1A complete the course. Studies on the retention of Mexican American/Latino students in English classes have been conducted at several California community colleges. One showed that only 35 percent of non-Puente Mexican American/Latino students successfully completed developmental writing and only 47 percent completed English 1A.

Chart 4

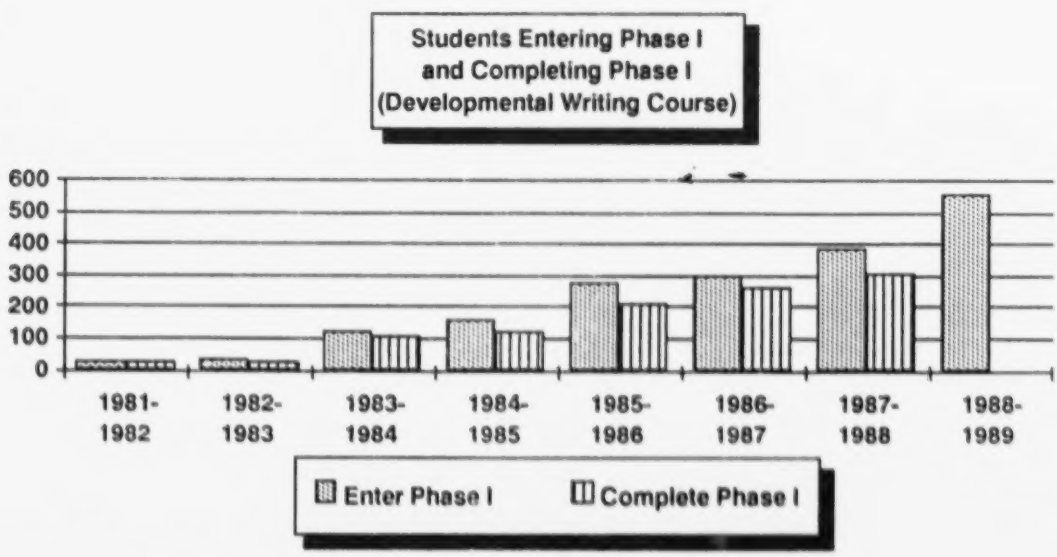
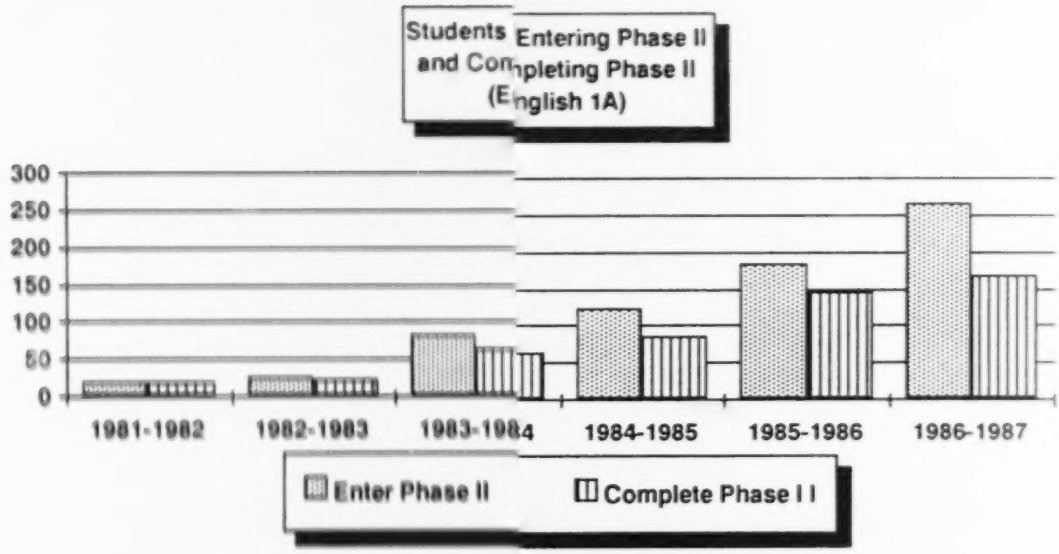


Chart 5



Transfer Data

Table 1 shows the number of Puente students who transfer and the institutions to which they transfer:

Table 1

Total Puente Transfers

1981-1988

	Number	Percent	UC/CSU Transfers
University of California	32	24	26%
California State University	89	66	74%
Private Colleges and Universities	13	10	
Total	**134**	**100**	

Program Awards and Recognition

Puente is being recognized locally, statewide, and nationally. The following gives an indication of the different groups who have given awards and recognition to the program:

- In July 1989, Puente will be recognized for excellence in education by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Alameda County.

- In February 1989, Puente was nominated for the second time for the H.B. McDaniel Award, given for exemplary guidance and counseling services to students.

- In February 1989, Puente received the first annual Program of the Year Award from the Hispanic Caucus of the California Association of Counseling and Development at its annual convention in San Diego.

- In July 1988, Puente received national recognition as one of 14 exemplary programs in the West and Southwest for college-bound minority students. (*Exemplary Programs for College-Bound Minority Students, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1988.*)

- In April 1988, Puente was cited by the Community College Chancellor's Office as one of two successful instructional programs for minority students in the State's community college system. (Olivia Mercado, *Successful Teaching Strategies: Instruction for Black and Hispanic Students in the California Community Colleges, Report 88-4.* Sacramento: Office of the Chancellor, California Community Colleges, April 1988.)

- In April 1987, Puente was recognized by the State of California Department of Justice for outstanding contributions in the area of education to the Hispanic community and the people of California.

Elements of Puente's Success

A Unique Collaboration Between English Teachers and Mexican American Counselors

Puente brings about an historic collaboration between English and Counseling, two departments that formerly were quite separate, both by function and habit. After their selection and initial training, Puente counselors and English teachers become working teams, conducting all aspects of the program on their campuses. Through the integration of their skills and their link with the mentors in the Hispanic community, the Puente teams are able to have a significant and positive impact on

the retention and transfer rate of Mexican American/Latino community college students.

Research-Based Writing Methods

Puente offers two sequential English courses, pre-1A and 1A, the college-level transfer course. The teaching methods are based on findings from the last 20 years of research in England and the United States on the development of writing and reading abilities. Characterized by frequent and extensive opportunities to write and read, courses emphasize small-group discussions of students' writings in which strengths are identified and developed.

Culturally-Based Academic Counseling

The Mexican American counselors selected for Puente share the cultural background of the students, and that of their parents and Puente mentors. This familiarity with the culture allows counselors to help students recognize their personal and academic strengths, thus encouraging student retention and accelerating their preparation for transfer.

An Exemplary Training Model with Ongoing Staff Development

The core of Puente's implementation is the Phase I and Phase II training institutes, extended residential workshops for the Puente counselor/English teacher teams. Successful approaches to academic counseling, writing instruction, and working with the Hispanic community are presented. Through extensive involvement in problem-solving, writing, and reading groups, the Puente teams both learn these new techniques and how to work together effectively. Following these initial training institutes, Puente teams meet together regionally three times a year for major ongoing staff development, problem solving, and sharing of resources.

Strong Community-Based Support

Puente relies on the direct support and involvement of the Hispanic community. Over 600 mentors from the professional community have donated 15,000 hours of their time to Puente students. Judges, lawyers, psychologists, accountants, reporters, university administrators, city council and school board members, doctors, scientists, and business people provide a model of commitment to the community, showing students that success is possible without having to abandon cultural identity. In a recent survey of Puente students who completed the program between 1983 and 1987 at Sacramento City College, 42 percent of the respondents reported that they were still in touch with their mentors.

A Working Partnership

The Hispanic community, the California Community Colleges, the University of California, and the philanthropic and corporate communities all contribute to Puente's success.

They work together in building bridges that enable students to reach their academic and career goals. For instance, a number of mentors belong to professional organizations, like engineering societies, that offer their resources to Puente students. Also, mentors work for corporations and help students obtain internships and scholarships. Corporate facilities are often used for Puente receptions attended by the community, college administrators, and all of the Puente participants. Thus, the community is contributing its resources to the colleges, which in turn are making Puente programs available to future leaders of the Hispanic community.

The private sector supported Puente almost entirely from 1983 until 1987. That sector's continuing support of Puente indicates a strong commitment to community colleges as well as to the Hispanic community.

A Strong Intersegmental Program

Since 1985, Puente has expanded its work with UC outreach personnel to develop the grassroots support needed to facilitate the transfer process for Mexican American/Latino community college students. University personnel have been invited to various Puente training workshops, where they have met with teachers, counselors, mentors, and students. They are now working closely with Puente counselors on articulation and transfer processes.

Future Considerations

Puente has now demonstrated success for seven years and the demand for the program continues to increase. However, in order to expand the program in California, while maintaining the quality of its current programs, Puente will need significant additional funding.

APPENDIX A

Colleges With Puente Projects

Cabrillo College
Aptos

Cerritos College
Norwalk

Chabot College
Hayward

City College of San Francisco
San Francisco

East Los Angeles College
Monterey Park

El Camino College
Torrance

Fresno City College
Fresno

Gavilan College
Gilroy

Laney College
Oakland

Rancho Santiago College
Santa Ana

Rio Hondo College
Whittier

Riverside Community College
Riverside

Sacramento City College
Sacramento

San Bernardino Valley College
San Bernardino

San Diego Mesa College
San Diego

San Joaquin Delta College
Stockton

Santa Rosa Junior College
Santa Rosa

Southwestern College
Chula Vista

West Valley College
Saratoga

APPENDIX B

Puente Project Advisory Board

CHAIR

Joaquin Avila
Past President and General Counsel
Mexican American Legal Defense and
Educational Fund (MALDEF) (1982-1985)

MEMBERS

Mary Barr, Ph.D.
Director
California Literature Project

Caroline Boitano
Vice President and Associate Director
BankAmerica Foundation

Douglas W. Burris
Deputy Vice Chancellor
California Community Colleges

Alice Cox, Ph.D.
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Director of Corporate Relations
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Professor
Department of Mexican American Studies
California State University, Long Beach

Honorable Cruz Reynoso
Vice Chairperson
California Postsecondary Education
Commission

Lea Ybarra, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Chicano/Latino Studies
California State University, Fresno

Honorable Carlos Ynostroza
Judge
Oakland/Piedmont/Emeryville
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